

**GENERAL ATOMICS ENERGY PRODUCTS**  
*Engineering Bulletin*

# **HIGH ENERGY DENSITY CAPACITORS FOR PULSED POWER APPLICATIONS**

**Fred MacDougall, Joel Ennis, Xiao Hui (Chip) Yang,  
Robert A. Cooper, John E. Gilbert, John F. Bates,  
Chip Naruo, Mark Schneider, Nathan Keller, Shama Joshi  
General Atomics Electronic Systems, Inc.  
4949 Greencraig Lane, San Diego, CA 92123-1675 USA**

**T. Richard Jow, Janet Ho, C. J. (Skip) Scozzie  
Army Research Laboratory  
2800 Powder Mill Road, Adelphi, MD 20783**

**S. P. S (Elizabeth) Yen  
Jet Propulsion Laboratory  
Pasadena, CA**

**Copyright © 2009 IEEE. Reprinted from:  
July 2009 IEEE Pulsed Power Conference  
Washington DC**

This material is posted here with permission of the IEEE. Such permission of the IEEE does not in any way imply IEEE endorsement of any of General Atomics Electronic Systems, Inc.'s products or services. Internal or personal use of this material is permitted. However, permission to reprint/republish this material for advertising or promotional purposes or for creating new collective works for resale or redistribution must be obtained from the IEEE by writing to [pubs-permissions@ieee.org](mailto:pubs-permissions@ieee.org).

By choosing to view this document, you agree to all provisions of the copyright laws protecting it.



4949 Greencraig Lane, San Diego, CA. 92123-1675  
858.522.8400

[www.ga-esi.com](http://www.ga-esi.com)

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>JUL 2009</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>High Energy Density Capacitors for Pulsed Power Applications</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>General Atomics Electronic Systems Inc,4949 Greencraig Lane,San Diego,CA,92123</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <b>see report</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>24</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

# HIGH ENERGY DENSITY CAPACITORS FOR PULSED POWER APPLICATIONS

Fred MacDougall, Joel Ennis, Xiao Hui (Chip) Yang, Robert A. Cooper, John E. Gilbert, John F. Bates,  
Chip Naruo, Mark Schneider, Nathan Keller, Shama Joshi  
*General Atomics Electronic Systems, Inc.*  
4949 Greencraig Lane, San Diego, CA 92123-1675 USA

T. Richard Jow, Janet Ho, C. J. (Skip) Scozzie  
*Army Research Laboratory*  
2800 Powder Mill Road, Adelphi, MD 20783

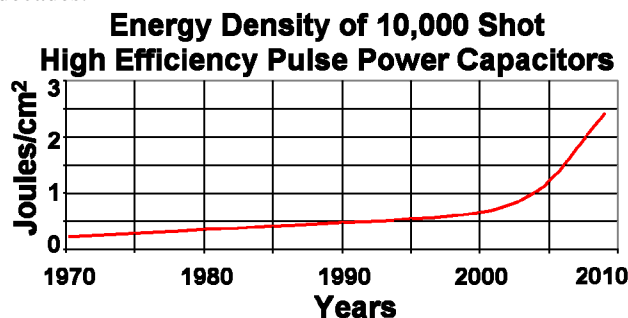
S. P. S (Elizabeth) Yen  
*Jet Propulsion Laboratory*  
Pasadena, CA

## Abstract

The improvement in the performance of high energy density capacitors used in pulsed power has accelerated over the past few years. This has resulted from increased research sponsored by the US Army Research Laboratory, in support of the US Military's needs. The capacitor development effort will be discussed as well as the results of both short term and long term testing of a new generation of high energy density capacitors.

## I. PROGRESS IN CAPACITOR ENERGY DENSITY

The field of high energy density capacitors encompasses a range of requirements. One of the focus areas of the US Army Research Laboratory (ARL) has been the high efficiency capacitors that are used in electro thermo chemical (ETC) Gun and electromagnetic railgun applications. Typically these capacitors are specified to survive 1000 shots which roughly matches the life of a gun barrel or 10k shots which roughly matches the life expectancy of a Navy gun system. Figure 1 plots the progress in energy density of high efficiency capacitors designed for this type of application over the past four decades.

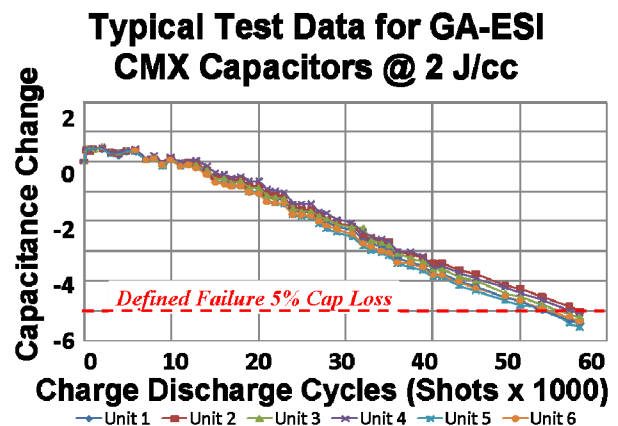


**Figure 1** – Progress in the energy density of high efficiency capacitors

The noticeable improvement in the rate of progress in the past five years is a direct result of the research funded by the ARL in this area of interest. As a result of this effort,

the US Military has access to capacitors that are about a third the size and half the cost of the capacitors that were available at the beginning of the program. This technology is used in the GA-ESI Type CMX capacitor line.

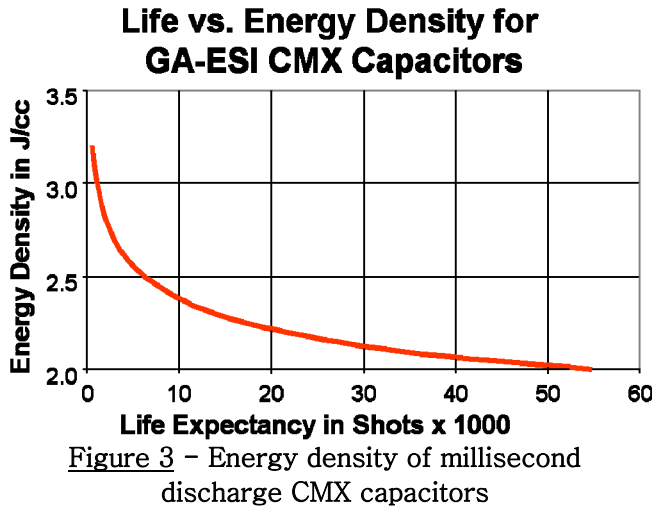
Figure 2 is a plot of the change in capacitance vs. charge/discharge cycles or shots where the discharge pulse rise time was in the millisecond regime. The data from 6 capacitors shows a well behaved controlled loss of capacitance down to 5% in 55k shots. Five percent is the traditional definition of failure for this type of capacitor. The capacitors are self healing and survive thousands of dielectric breakdowns before getting to 5% capacitance loss. The capacitors are still operational at that point but the build up of gas in the capacitor increases the likelihood of the capacitor failing in an unacceptable manner when the capacitance loss exceeds 5%.



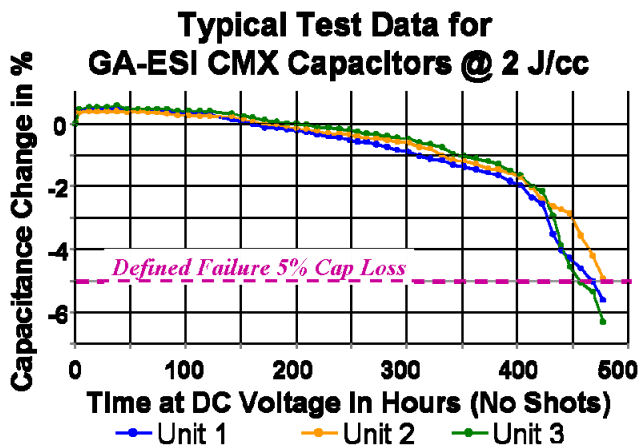
**Figure 2** – Capacitance loss of CMX capacitors under pulse discharge duty

The data in Figure 2 are for CMX capacitors operating at 2 J/cc. The energy density for a capacitors that will survive 10,000 shots is 2.4 J/cc for the CMX capacitors. When the capacitors are operated at 3 J/cc

they will survive 1000 charge discharge cycles. A plot of life expectancy vs. energy density can be found in Figure 3. In the range shown, the life expectancy is following the 20<sup>th</sup> power rule of the applied field.



Capacitor performance is sometimes specified in terms of the DC life. Figure 4 is test data for three CMX capacitors tested at 2 J/cc under DC voltage conditions. The capacitors survived more than 400 hours, however it should be noted that the slope of the curve changed once the testing got beyond that point. This could be an indication that a new failure mechanism has been introduced.



Some applications require significantly longer DC life than can be achieved at 2 J/cc. Figure 5 is a plot of a capacitor using the CMX technology operating at 1.3 J/cc. The capacitor survived for about 3000 hours. The testing was done for about 8 hours a day during normal work days and took several years to complete.

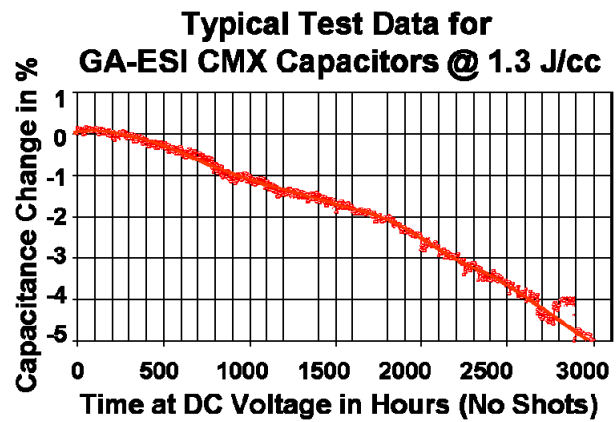


Figure 5 - Capacitance loss of CMX capacitors in DC applications at 1.3 J/cc

The data of Figure 5 represents a significant improvement in the DC life characteristics of this type of capacitor. Previous capacitors lasted only a few hours at energy densities of 1.3 J/cc and this was improved to several thousand hours over the course of the ARL development effort.

## II. RELIABILITY AND SAFETY FOR HIGH ENERGY DENSITY CAPACITOR SYSTEMS

The achievements in high energy density capacitors has been a significant contributor to the success of fieldable military pulse power systems. This has brought a number of new concerns to light. The capacitor shown in Figure 6 has a number of features that were developed as solutions to some of these problems.



Figure 6 - Microsecond discharge capacitor with internal dump resistor

The capacitor of Figure 6 has two sets of terminals each with parallel bar terminations. This was needed to facilitate a low inductance, high current connection to the rest of the equipment. The schematic for this capacitor is similar to that shown in Figure 7. There are separate high voltage, low current, terminals for charging the capacitor marked "+" & "-" with high voltage lead wires that will connect to the control

circuit.

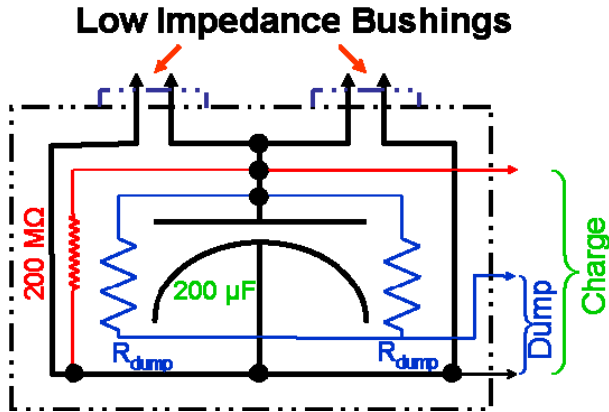


Figure 7 - Typical schematic for the capacitor in Figure 6 (Patent Pending)

The capacitor of has an internal dump resistor, " $R_{\text{dump}}$ " of Figure 7 that is connected to a third high voltage low current terminal marked "R" in Figure 6. A low current dump switch in connected between the "R" terminal and the "-" terminal in order to safely dump the energy stored in the capacitor when the circuit is shut down. This unique circuit takes up very little room inside the capacitor and use the thermal mass of the capacitor to absorb the dump energy.

The resistance value of the dump resistors shown in Figure 7 is chosen based on the peak current capability of the dump switch and consideration of time to discharge the capacitor to a safe voltage. Typically the bleed-down time is of concern until the capacitor voltage is 50 volts or less. The bleeddown time for various resistors in a 200μF 15 kV capacitor application is shown in Figure 8.

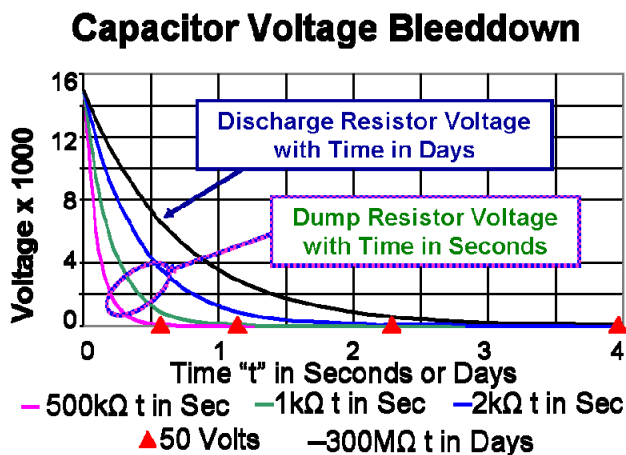


Figure 8 - Voltage bleeddown from 15kV with various discharge resistors

The development of internal dump resistors was spurred by concerns about external dump resistor in terms of shock and vibration, mounting requirements, total volume, system reliability, and cost. All of these parameters were improved with the advent of the internal dump resistor.

Along with the internal dump resistors, there is a 200MΩ discharge resistor shown in Figure 7. This is a fixed resistor that will bring the voltage in the capacitor from 15 kV to 50 volts in about 4 days. These high energy density capacitors have a deeply stored charge that can come to the surface after the capacitor has been discharged. The discharge resistor will minimize the voltage that the capacitor can reach after it has been discharged.

There is always a concern about operator safety with high energy pulsed power systems. There is little observable difference between a charged and uncharged capacitor. In the laboratory, external devices like that shown in Figure 9 are added to the circuit so that the operator will have a local indication that the capacitor is charged. If the normal shutdown circuit does not work properly, the relaxation oscillator will still be blinking and buzzing indicating that the capacitor is still alive.

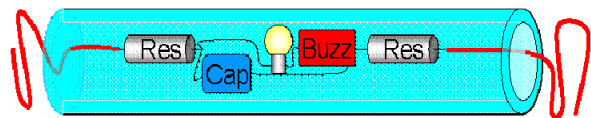


Figure 9 - Sketch of a high voltage warning circuit based on a neon lamp relaxation oscillator in a Lexan® tube

The need to identify a charged capacitor becomes more acute in a military operating theater. The equipment will be going into harms way and is likely to sustain damage. The first responders are likely to have only a rudimentary understanding of the system rather than an electrical engineering degree. The circuit of Figure 10 is designed to minimize this problem. It is the schematic of a 50 kJ 10 kV capacitor with an internal charged capacitor warning system. The schematic has two relaxation oscillators connected in series. The oscillator on the left consists of a small capacitor and a neon lamp what will flash continually at voltages in the hundred volt range but will be on continually when the capacitor is at 10kV. The relaxation oscillator on the right in Figure 10 has a significantly larger capacitor, a neon lamp and a buzzer. This oscillator will store more energy than the circuit on the left and deliver a brighter flash and audible sound less often than the oscillator on the left. At full voltage the oscillator on the right will be flashing and buzzing. In the hundred volt range, it will be doing the

same thing but with long pauses between operations. A typical location of the indicating lamps is shown in Figure 11.

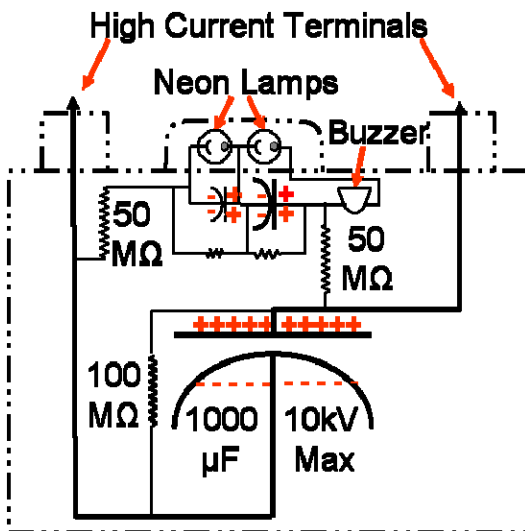


Figure 10 - Schematic of a capacitor with an internal charged capacitor warning circuit based on a neon lamp relaxation oscillator (Patent Pending)



Figure 11 - Typical capacitor with an internal charged capacitor warning circuit

The charged capacitor warning circuit mounted internally to the capacitor to minimize the probability that the circuit will become disconnected from the capacitor. The environment of the capacitor provides electrical insulation

and thermal mass for the circuit. It also provides a significant measure of protection from shock and vibration on a deployed system.

### III. STATE OF THE ART FOR HIGH ENERGY DENSITY CAPACITOR AND NEAR TERM PROJECTIONS

The improvement in performance of energy discharge capacitors in the areas of focus has been described above. The improvements have made pulse power equipment smaller and more affordable. The goals of the program have been met. The rate of improvement in the two areas discussed is expected to slow due to a lack of funding to pursue the technology. The focus of the development effort has shifted to much faster capacitors and capacitors operating in hostile environments.

The progress in pulse power capacitors is often plotted on a Ragone plot of specific energy vs. specific power. This has been done for today's capacitor in Figure 12. The capacitors plotted include capacitors used in microsecond discharge applications, and capacitors used recently in large applications are included in the plot. The plot includes a time scale is representative of the period of time in which the energy is delivered.

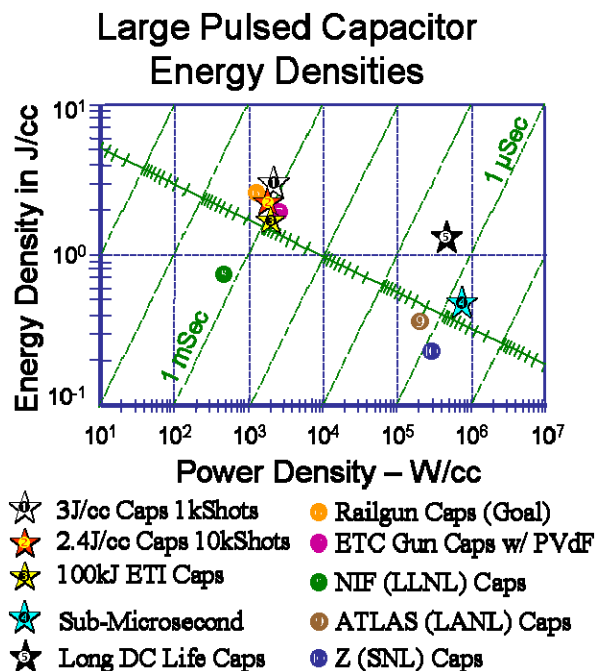


Figure 12 - Ragone Plot for High Energy Density Capacitors

The area of greatest interest to the military today is the nanosecond to millisecond range. There are

commercial applications in this range but they are not mobile and there is little penalty to be paid for doubling the volume of the equipment. Most military applications are mobile and the logistics of moving and supplying such systems exact a premium on size, weight and efficiency. Because of this difference in needs of commercial and military applications, it is not likely that high energy density capacitor development will go forward with out support from the military.

#### **IV. SUMMARY**

Significant progress has been made in high energy density energy storage capacitors. High efficiency capacitors are available with energy densities as high as 3 J/cc for 1000 shots or 3000 hours of DC life at 1.3 J/cc. While progress has been significant over the past few years, it is not expected to continue at the same rate due to a change in focused areas of interest on the part of the US military. The development effort at GA-ESI will be aimed at other applications.

#### **V. ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Portions of the research reported in this document/presentation was performed in connection with contract W911QX-04-D-0003 with the U.S. Army Research Laboratory. The views and conclusions contained in this document/presentation are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as presenting the official policies or position, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Army Research Laboratory or the U.S. Government unless so designated by other authorized documents. Citation of manufacturers' or trade names does not constitute an official endorsement or approval of the use thereof. The U.S. Government is authorized to reproduce and distribute

reprints for Government purposes notwithstanding any copyright notation hereon.

#### **VI. REFERENCES**

- [1] F. W. MacDougall, T. R. Jow, J. B. Ennis, X. H. Yang, S. P. S. Yen, R. A. Cooper, J. E. Gilbert, M. Schneider, C. Naruo, J. Bates, "Pulsed Power and Power Conditioning Capacitors," 2nd Euro-Asian Pulsed Power Conference, Vilnius, Lithuania 2008
- [2] Pulsed Power Capacitors – F. MacDougall, T. R. Jow, J. Ennis, S.P.S. Yen, X. H. Yang, J. Ho – IEEE Power Modulator Conference May 2008
- [3] High-Specific-Power Capacitors - J. B. Ennis, F. W. MacDougall, X. H. Yang, A. H. Bushnell, R. A. Cooper, J. E. Gilbert - IEEE Power Modulator Conference May 2008
- [4] T. Crowley, W. Shaheen, S. Bayne, R. Jow, "Testing of High Energy Density Capacitors," 16th IEEE International Pulsed Power Conference, Albuquerque, NM, June 2007.
- [5] J. Ennis, F. W. MacDougall, X. H. Yang, R. A. Cooper, K. Seal, C. Naruo, et al., "Recent Advances in High Voltage, High Energy Capacitor Technology," 16th IEEE International Pulsed Power Conference, Albuquerque, NM, June 2007.
- [6] F. MacDougall, J. Ennis, X. H. Yang, K. Seal, S. Phatak, B. Spinks, et al., "Large High Energy Density Pulse Discharge Capacitor Characteristics," 15th IEEE International Pulsed Power Conference, Monterey, CA, June 2005.



# High Energy Density Capacitors for Pulse Power Applications

Presented at the IEEE PPC July 2009  
Washington DC

Fred MacDougall, Joel Ennis, Xiao Hui Yang , R. A. Cooper, J. E. Gilbert,  
J. F. Bates, C. Nauro, M. Schneider, N. Keller, S. Joshi  
*General Atomics Electronic Systems, Inc.*  
*4949 Greencraig Lane, San Diego, CA 92123-1675 USA*

T. Richard Jow, S. Scozzi. J. Ho  
*Army Research Laboratory 2800 Powder Mill Road, Adelphi, MD 20783*

This material is posted here with permission of the IEEE. Such permission of the IEEE does not in any way imply IEEE endorsement of any of General Atomics Electronic Systems, Inc.'s products or services. Internal or personal use of this material is permitted. However, permission to reprint/republish this material for advertising or promotional purposes or for creating new collective works for resale or redistribution must be obtained from the IEEE by writing to [pubs-permissions@ieee.org](mailto:pubs-permissions@ieee.org).

By choosing to view this document, you agree to all provisions of the copyright laws protecting it.



# Outline

- **Performance Metrics for Pulsed Power Capacitors**
- **Recent Advances in Pulsed Power Capacitor Energy Density**
  - GA-ESI high energy density type CMX capacitors
- **Safety Circuits**
  - NEW internal dump resistors
  - NEW internal charged capacitor warning systems
- **Conclusions**

# Performance Metrics for Pulsed Power Capacitors

- **Energy Density**

$$U = \frac{1}{2} \cdot \epsilon_0 \cdot \epsilon_r \cdot E^2 \cdot PF \cdot 10^6$$

- Where:

- U is in units of J/cm<sup>3</sup> (J/cc)
    - $\epsilon_0$ : 8.85 x 10<sup>12</sup> F/m (Permittivity of free space)
    - $\epsilon_r$ : Relative Permittivity
    - E: Applied electric field in MV/m or V/μm
    - PF: Packing Factor Pulse Life

- **Shot Life**

- Number of charge/discharge cycles experienced before 5% capacitance loss.

- **DC Life**

- Hours of continuous operation while charged at rated voltage before 5% capacitance loss.

# Recent Advances in Pulsed Power Capacitor Technology

- GA-ESI has taken an incremental approach to developing high ED capacitors

## Small-scale single winding capacitors

- For rapidly evaluating a particular technology
- Minimal manufacturing overhead

## Single stack capacitors

- Demonstrating technology on a larger scale
- Difficulties & failure modes associated with large capacitors

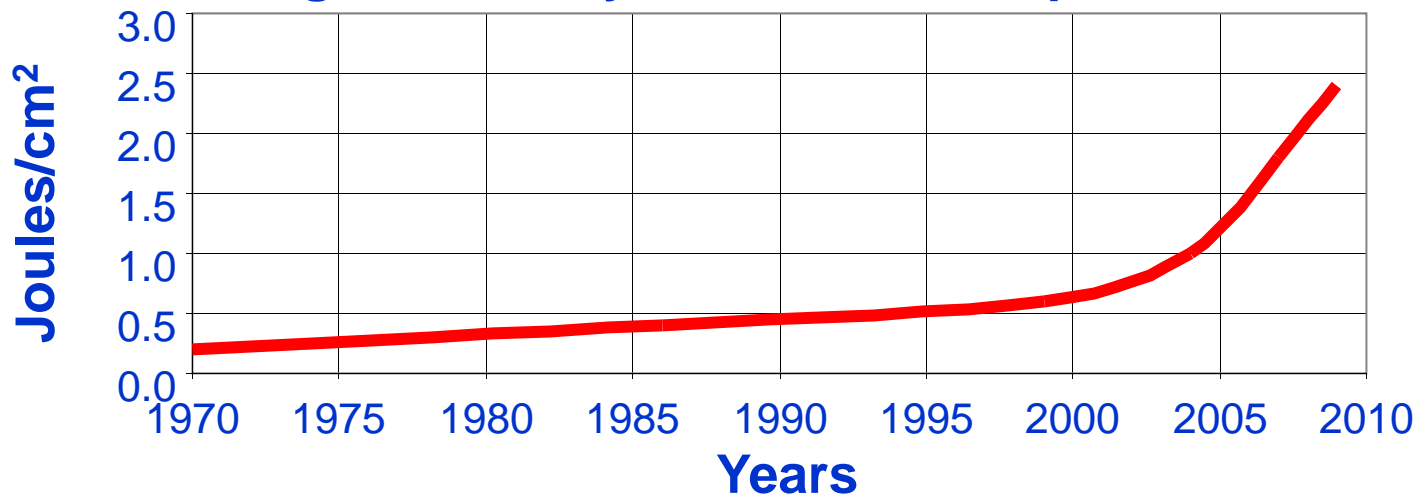
## High Energy Pulsed Power Capacitors

- Dozens of kJ (50 kJ – 260 kJ)
- Welded steel can packaging

# Recent Advances in Energy Density

- The last 6 years have yielded tremendous gains in capacitor energy density
  - Achieved by increasing breakdown strength via improving polymer film quality and capacitor construction.

**Energy Density of 10,000 Shot  
High Efficiency Pulse Power Capacitors**

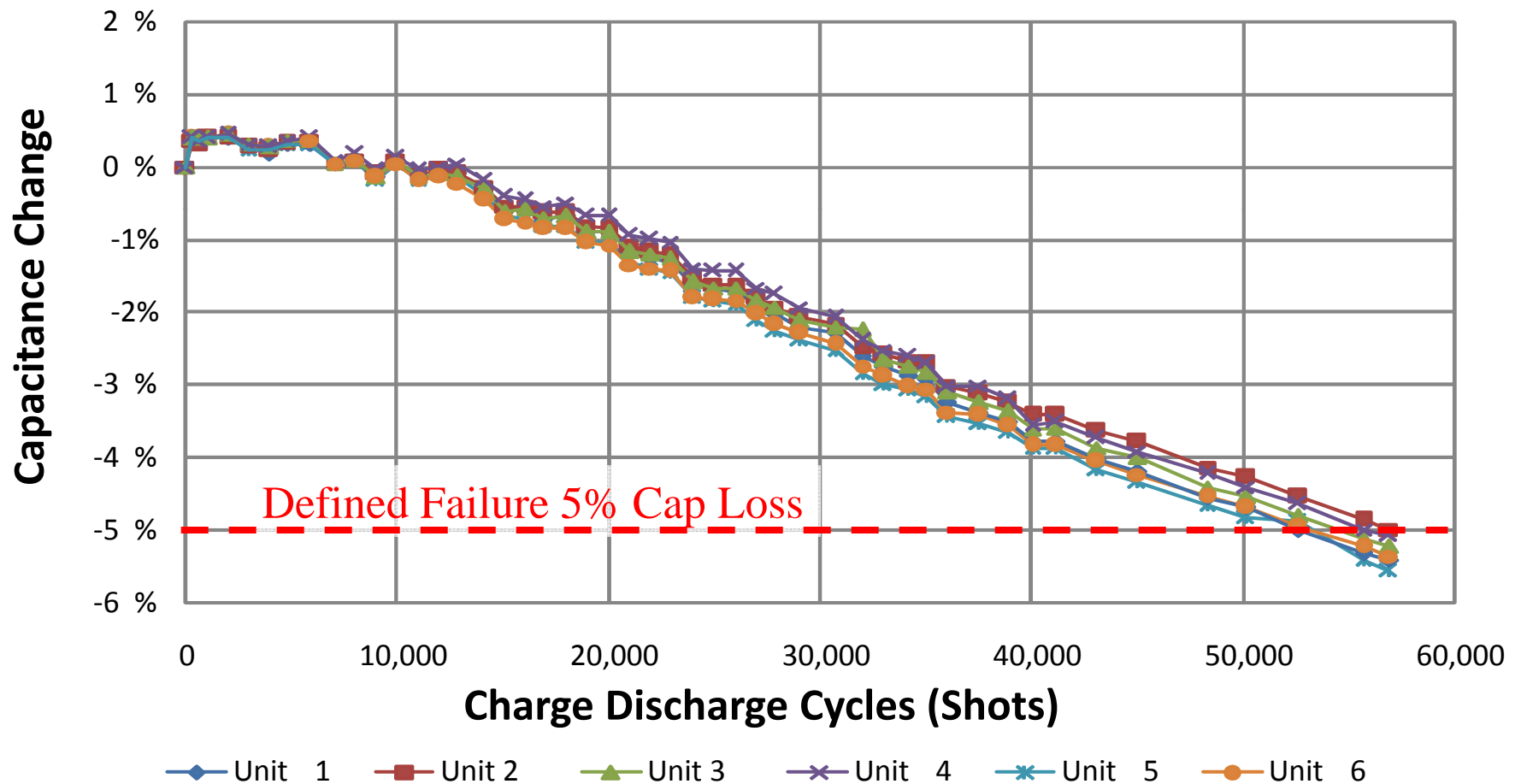


*The primary  
driver was  
ARL's  
sustained  
focus on high  
energy density  
capacitors*

- GA-ESI CMX capacitor technology is the latest manifestation of this development effort
  - *The hockey stick curve lives !!!*

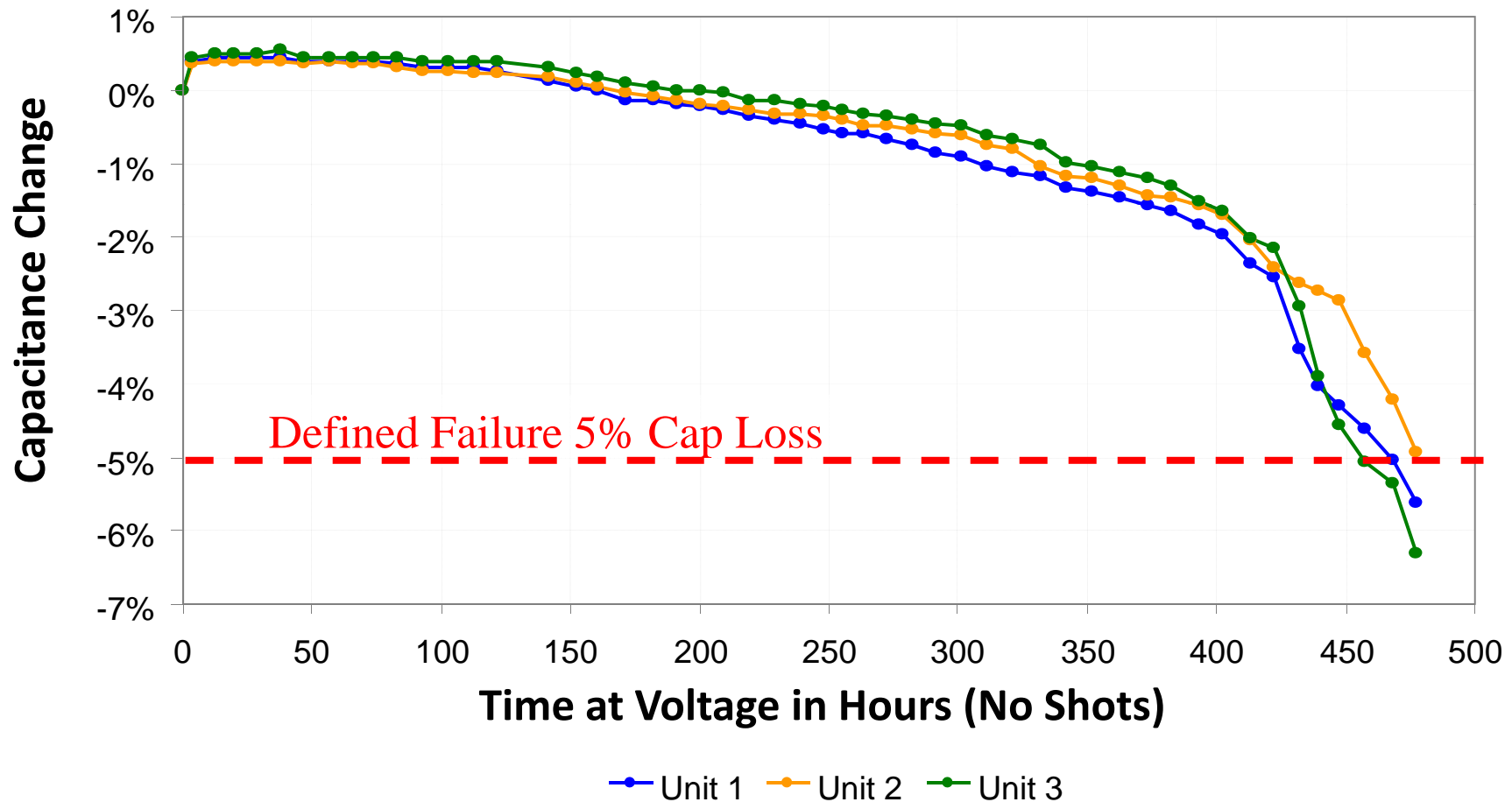
# Recent Advances in Energy Density

## Typical Test Data for GA-ESI CMX Capacitors @ 2 J/cc



# Recent Advances in Energy Density

## Typical Test Data for GA-ESI CMX Capacitors @ 2 J/cc



# Recent Advances in Energy Density

## GA-ESI - 3 Joule/cc CMX Capacitors

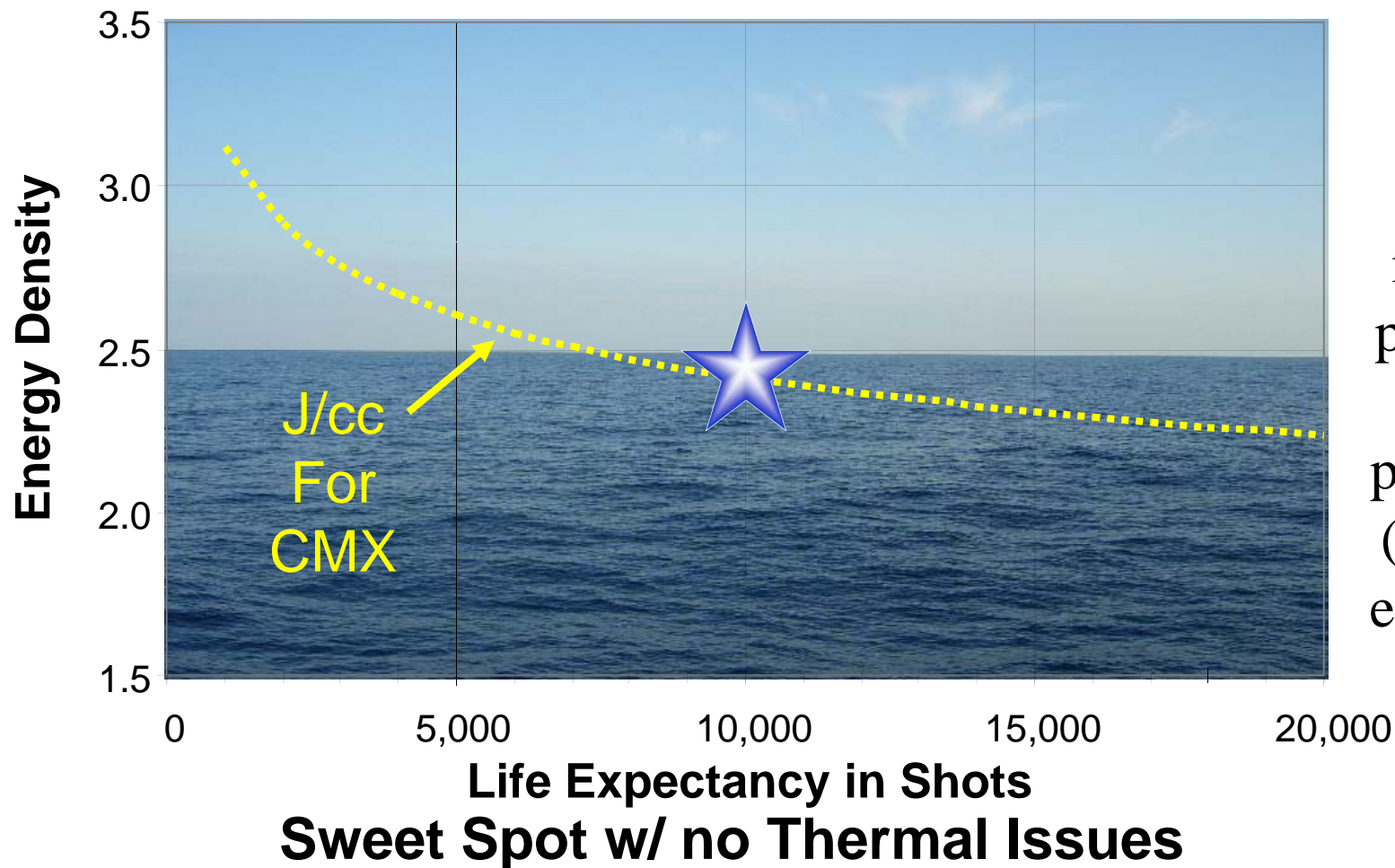
- 50,000 Joule
- 6.6 kV, 2310  $\mu$ F unit
- Dimensions
  - 11.18 cm x
  - 36.19 cm x
  - 41.66 cm
- Weight - 21 kg
- 3.0 J/cc (2.4 J/g)
- 1000 Shots
- Pulse life testing
  - 3 s charge time
  - 1 s hold time





# Recent Advances in Energy Density

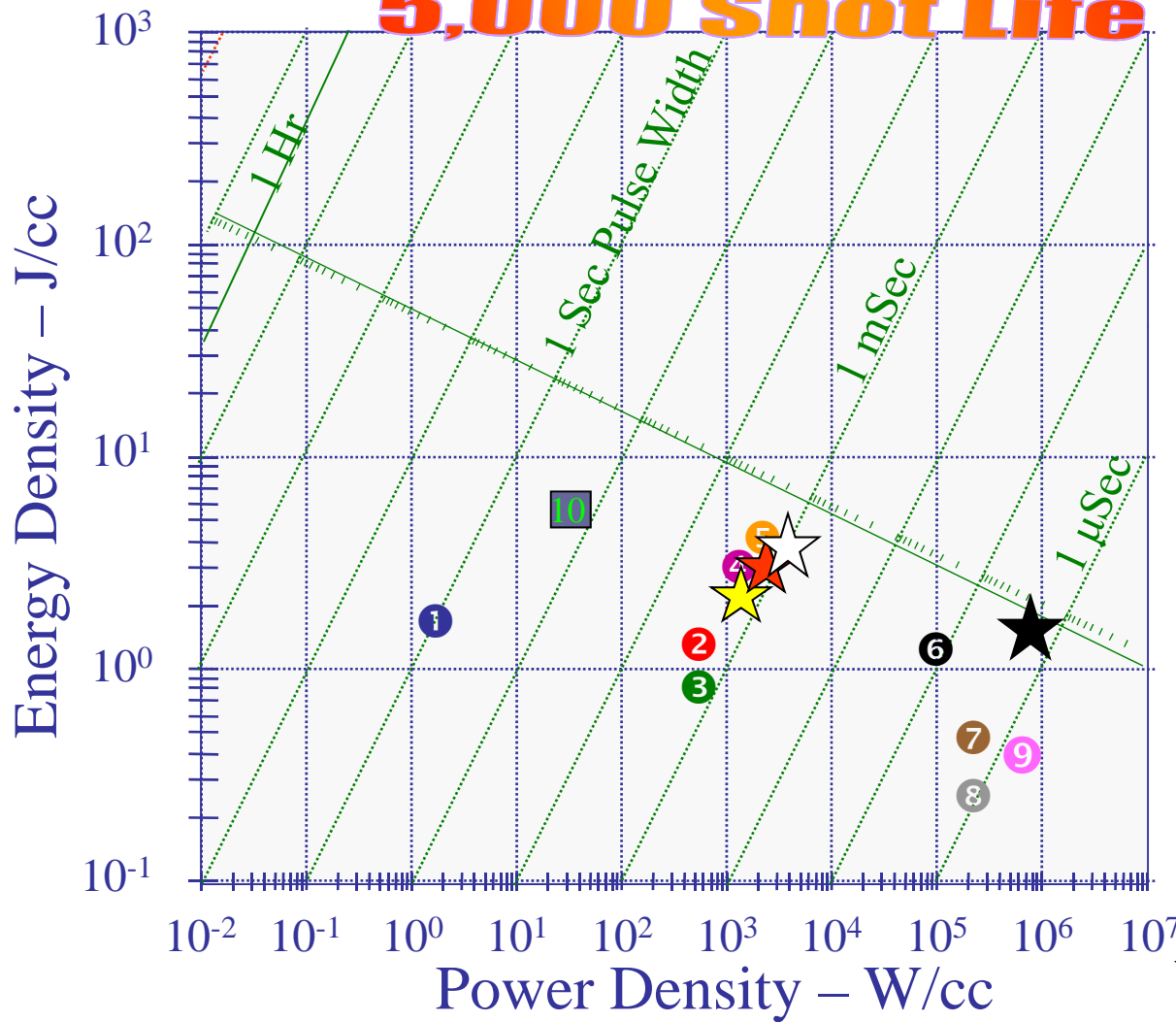
## Life vs Energy Density



Life expectancy is inversely proportioned to the 15<sup>th</sup> power of “E” (the Applied electric field)

# Large Pulsed Capacitor Energy Densities

**Normalized to  
5,000 Shot Life**



## Legend

- ① EMALS Filter Caps
- ② Defibrillator Caps
- ③ NIF (LLNL) Caps
- ④ ETC Gun Caps w/ PVdF
- ⑤ Railgun Caps (Goal)
- ⑥ Fast HED Caps
- ⑦ ATLAS (LANL) Caps
- ⑧ Z (SNL) Caps
- ⑨ Plastic Case Caps
- ⬜ Flywheels
- ★ 100kJ ETI Caps
- ★ MJ/4
- ★ 3J/cc Capacitor
- ★ Long DC Life Caps
- ★ Sub-Microsecond

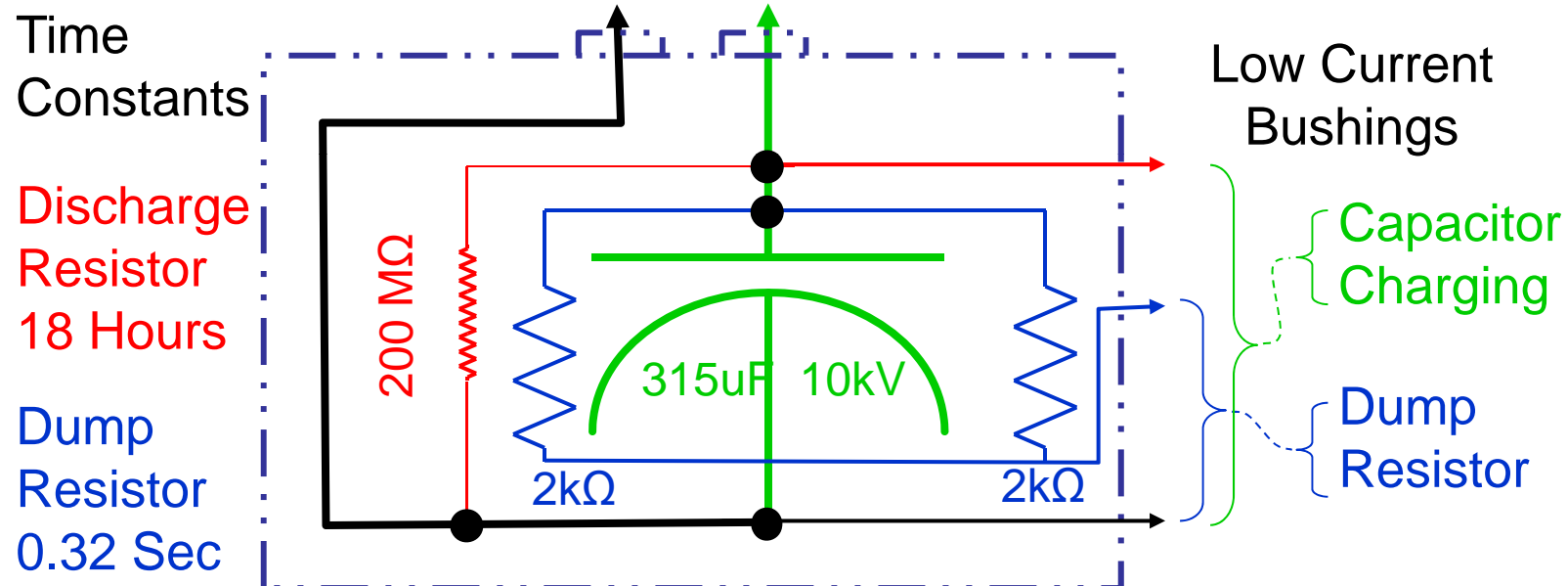
# Safety Circuits for Pulse Discharge Capacitors

- **Internal Discharge Resistor**
  - Discharges the capacitors in days
- **Internal Dump Resistor**
  - Discharges the capacitor in seconds
  - Requires an external switch
  - Uses the thermal mass of the capacitor
  - Shock and vibration tolerant
  - No measurable added volume needed
  - Cost effective
- **Charged Capacitor Warning Circuit**
  - Provides a signal whenever the capacitor is charged - Visual, audible, and/or radio.

# NEW Internal Dump Resistors

## Internal Dump Resistors Now Available in Capacitors

### High Current Bushings

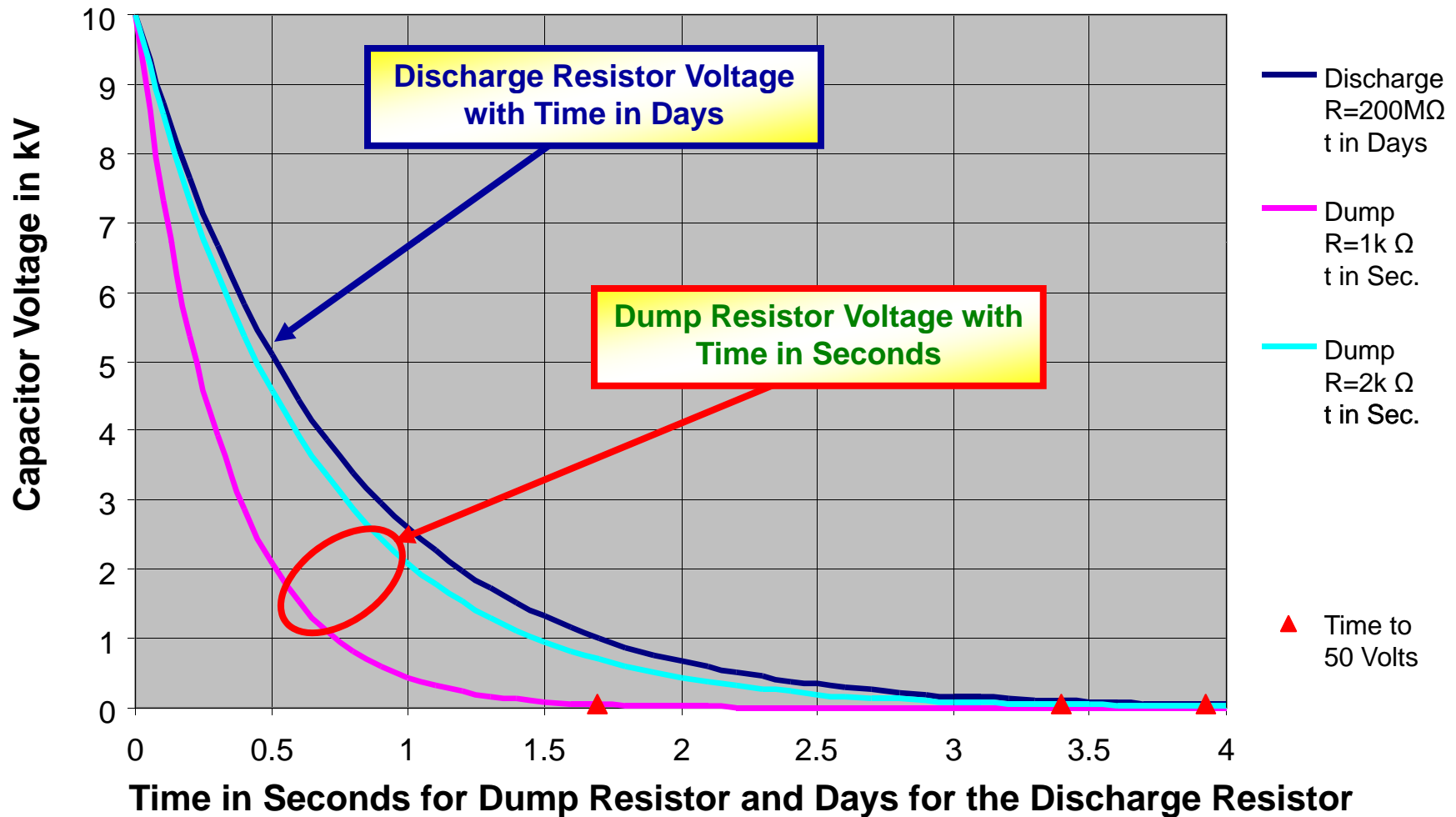


Typical capacitor schematic with parallel  $2k\Omega$  dump resistors

- No measurable loss of energy density
- Uses the capacitors thermal mass

# NEW Internal Dump Resistors

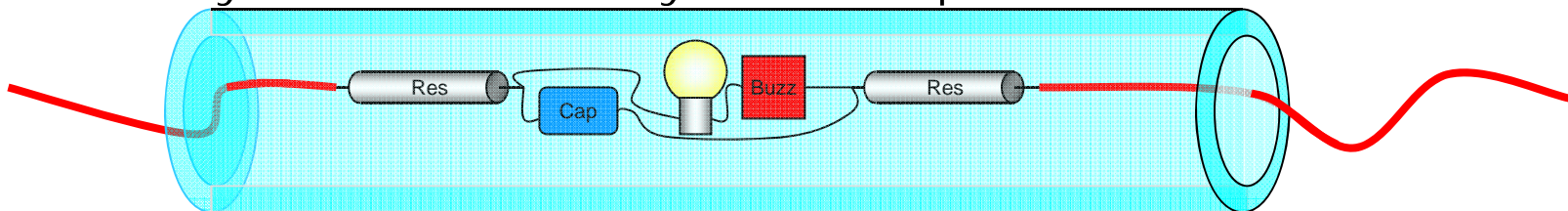
## Capacitor Voltage During a Dump



# Capacitor Warning Circuits

- **Relaxation Oscillator Circuit**

- Oscillator capacitor is charged through HV resistors.
- Neon lamp flashes when voltage is high enough
- The oscillator cap discharge will flash the light and activate the buzzer.
- The power level and repetition rate associated with the warning signal is controlled by the size of the oscillator capacitor.
- Reprate is proportioned to voltage
- Easy to add externally to the capacitor



Clear polycarbonate tube plugged with HV Resistors and HV lead wires.

- **Electronic circuits are commonly used rather than a neon lamp.**
  - Radio signals can be used with these circuits.

# NEW Capacitor Warning Circuit



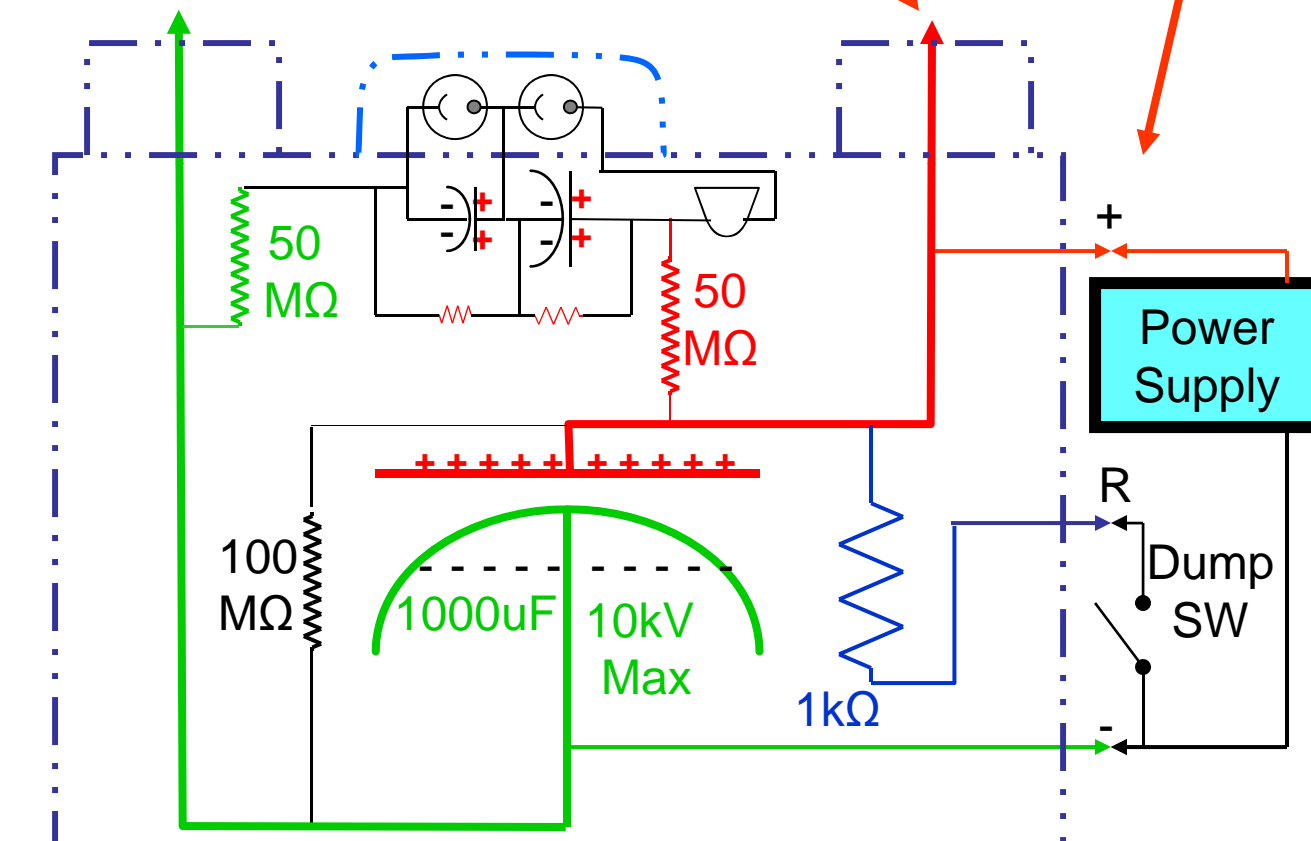
1 Charge  
2 Cycles (3)  
3 Dump

High Current Terminals

Low Current Terminals

Charged Capacitor  
Indication Circuit

- **Example**
  - 50 kJ 10kV
- **Low Current Terminals**
  - Energy dump
  - Charging
- **Safety Circuits**
  - Bleeder resistors
    - 5 x RC ~ 3 Days
  - Internal dump resistor
  - warning circuits
    - Flashing
    - Flash/Buzz



**DANGER  
HIGH VOLTAGE**

**Patent Pending**

**GENERAL ATOMICS  
ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS**



# Capacitor Warning Circuits

- Pulse power systems going into harms way are likely to sustained damage and the first responders will probably be E3s not EEs.
  - There is a need to identify the hazard.
- **The circuit:**
  - is powered by the capacitors stored charge.
  - can be designed to be silenced with a radio signal
  - will work if the capacitor becomes disconnected from the circuit.
- **Typical Warning Circuit at 10kV, with 50M $\Omega$  min, 2 watts max, and 200  $\mu$ Amps, max is not like to cause serious injury due to incidental contact.**

# Conclusions

- **Extensive testing of GA-ESI type CMX capacitors has demonstrated energy densities of:**
  - 3 J/cc for >1000 Shots
  - 2 J/cc for >10,000 shots
  - 2 J/cc for >450 hours at DC voltage
- **Reliable dump resistors are now available internal to pulse discharge capacitors.**
  - Low cost, S&V tolerant, and no measurable volume increase.
- **Charged capacitor warning circuits are now available internal to pulsed discharge capacitors.**
  - They work even when the capacitor has become disconnected from all other circuits.
  - Provide visual, audio, and/or radio signals

# Acknowledgement

Portions of the research reported in this document/presentation was performed in connection with contract W911QX-04-D-0003 with the U.S. Army Research Laboratory. The views and conclusions contained in this document/presentation are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as presenting the official policies or position, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Army Research Laboratory or the U.S. Government unless so designated by other authorized documents. Citation of manufacturers' or trade names does not constitute an official endorsement or approval of the use thereof. The U.S. Government is authorized to reproduce and distribute reprints for Government purposes notwithstanding any copyright notation hereon.